

UMC District Superintendents Part IV: Annual Conference Trends

by Kelley Fenelon
November 17, 2016

This is the fourth and final post focused on the presence of historically underrepresented groups among district superintendents. The following charts compare trends within DS positions across annual conferences. Specifically, these charts seek to help us find an initial response to the following question: do we see a pattern in the presence or absence of diversity as the number of district superintendents increases? In other words, is the diversity of district superintendents simply a matter of numerical opportunity? Do efforts at diversity benefit from having more DS positions to fill?

As the following charts suggest, the short answer is no.

In this first chart, we see a snapshot of district superintendents in 2015. The bars depicted in the chart represent the district superintendents in every annual conference. Each bar is divided into two colors: blue illustrates the total number of female district superintendents in the annual conference, and green illustrates the total number of male district superintendents. The annual conferences are arranged so that the total number of district superintendents per AC increases from left to right. The ACs with only one district superintendent are on the leftmost side of the chart; the AC with 17 district superintendents are on the rightmost side of the chart.

This organization allows us to see how the total number of district superintendents in a given AC relates to the appointment of female and male district superintendents. A clear trend for men emerges: as we scan the chart from left to right, we see increasing amounts of green, which tells us that the more district superintendents, the more male district superintendents. The blue of the chart has a general upward trend across the chart, but it does not increase as steadily as the green. Moreover, the blue – or number of female district superintendents – never increases by much, and ceases to increase at all at one point. The proportion of blue and green (or female and male) in each bar is more equitable among those ACs with a smaller total number of district superintendents. As the total number increases, proportionality diminishes and only men benefit from the addition of additional district superintendent positions.

This second chart performs the same descriptive work for a different identity division. For the sake of rendering the story it tells with stark clarity, it combines all individuals who identify with non-white racial and ethnic groups and illustrates them with purple. All white persons are illustrated with green. Scanning this chart, it is clear that those identifying as white are very well represented both numerically and proportionally. The presence of people of color does not seem to follow a pattern, even failing to increase meaningfully across the chart. In fact,

racial/ethnic diversity appears haphazard, dependent upon something other than the total number of district superintendents. Overall, those identified with a racial/ethnic group do not benefit from a greater number of DS positions. Instead, the number and proportion of white district superintendents increases as the total number of district superintendents increases. While that general trend is also true for men in the previous chart, it does appear that women find greater benefit from a larger total number of district superintendents than do racial/ethnic groups.

Ultimately, do those annual conferences with more DS positions fill them with more diverse elders? Are the district superintendent positions more representative of the UMC's population when there are more positions to fill? The response to these questions seems clear: in fact, only white persons and men benefit from a greater number of district superintendents. Does this reality indicate that a certain number of women or those who identify with a historically underrepresented racial/ethnic group feel like "enough" within each AC's district superintendents ranks? Does some amount seem to indicate female or racial/ethnic "saturation"? Or are the ranks of eligible elders simply most populated by white persons and men?

With these questions in mind, and based upon the discussion of the charts above, what might you read using this final district superintendent chart? This chart applies the same logic with more specificity: here, the bars use colors to illustrate ethnic women, ethnic men, white women, and white men. What happens when racial and gender identities intersect?